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SUBJECT: FINLAND: IRAQI HUMAN SMUGGLING CASES

REF: HELSINKI 00159

11. SUMMARY. Iraqi asylum cases in Finland are on the rise, following a shift in the Government's refugee policy. As the Iraqi population rises, Finnish officials encounter instances of people trying to circumvent refugee processes abroad to reunite with family and former neighbors now resident in Finland. Finnish officials in the small city of Oulu have identified several instances of human smuggling. Officials worry about an increase in criminality among an idle, mostly male immigrant population. END SUMMARY.

12. On December 11, the Finnish press reported that three Iraqis had been arrested for smuggling five Iraqis into the northern city of Oulu (near the Swedish border). In a December 15 conversation with PolOff, Border Guard officials stated that they found no evidence of human trafficking, noting that all five applied for asylum in Finland after arrival. According to the officials, the asylum requests remain with the immigration office. The officials suspect that the arrested Iraqis may have been involved in other smuggling incidences occurring between June and September 12008. They described two cases in Oulu involving five aliens each and another case in nearby Kemi where an ethnic Iraqi resident in Sweden brought in one Iraqi individual without official papers.

13. The officials said the Iraqis came to Oulu to join relatives - mostly from Mosul and Kirkuk - who had previously gained permission to stay in Finland or were already in the asylum process. (NOTE: Official statistics support a broad estimate of the Iraqi population in Oulu, a city of about 130,000, in the low hundreds. END NOTE.) From their interviews with those smuggled, the officials believe that the route for those interviewed was Iraq, Turkey, Greece, Italy, and Sweden, with Finland the intended and final destination. They also believe that the Iraqis pay more than \$10,000 at the beginning of the route to get out of Iraq, then 2,000 euros to get through central Europe and another 2,000 euros to get through Sweden.

14. The Officials expressed two major concerns surrounding the smuggling case. First, as the majority of the asylum seekers arriving in Oulu are men 20-30 years of age, the officials are concerned that crime could grow if the asylum-seekers have nothing to do. (NOTE: The officials noted that a number of asylum seekers claim to be 18 years but are later found to be older. Finnish officials say asylum seekers claim to be minors because the application process is longer, a deportation decision is difficult to make if parents of a minor cannot be located, and family reunification rules make it easier for minors to join parents resident in Finland. END NOTE.) The officials' second concern is that political cells or groups from Iraq could regroup in Finland, though they had no evidence of political ties or related activities among the asylees.

15. According to the Finnish Migration Service, the number of Iraqi asylum seekers in Finland has more than doubled since 2006, and Iraqi applications are the only ones increasing. Iraq represented the thirdhighest group of asylum seekers in

2006, numbering 225 applications. In 2007, it became the highest at 327 applications and so far in 2008, through August 30, Iraq again ranks highest as a source country with 464 applications. Only one in four applicants is female.

16. COMMENT. The increase in asylum seekers from Iraqi Kurdistan is in line with a Government of Finland shift in focus to Iraqi Kurds via UNHCR referral (REFTEL). Finnish officials generally express concerns about criminality within young immigrant populations. The Finnish government does not track ethnic populations separately as a matter of law, creating difficulties in tracking statistics related to certain populations. The limited crime statistics available do not point to a level of criminality disproportionate to the Iraqi population. END COMMENT.
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